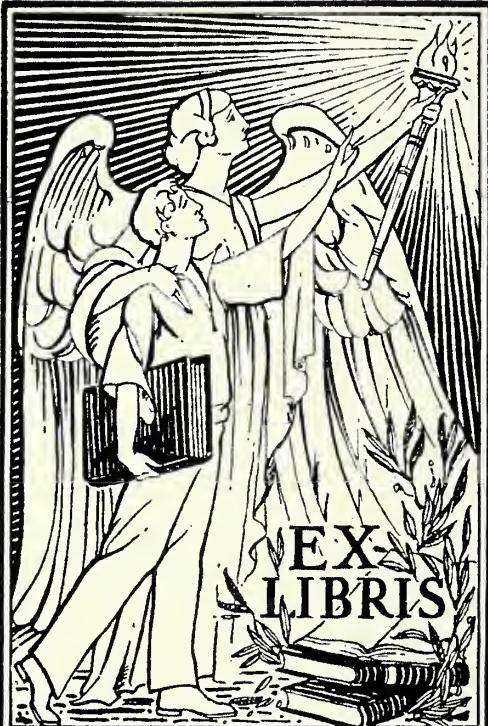


"THE GASSER"
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Colorado School for the
Deaf and the Blind

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the Gasser

**Colorado School
For The
Deaf and Blind**

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of Colorado Interstate Gas Company, Colorado Springs, Colorado.



Happiness and Hope Found in Unfolding Wonders of the World



By DOLORES STARK

I turned into the circular drive fronting the weathered stone building and parked beneath the large trees. Trees, bare and snow-laden. Sunlight glinted and sparkled on the ice particles until it was necessary for me to squint out some of the brightness.

The sturdy sign at the entrance had read, "Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind."

The appointment had been made. I was to see Roy M. Stelle, superintendent of the school. His office was in the administration building.

Letting my hand slide along the iron railing, I walked up the steps and entered the large hallway leading to the offices.

Somewhere in one of the adjoining buildings, an organ played "Joy to the World" . . . for it was nearing Christmas time.

"Well, where shall we start?" the tall superintendent asked.

"How about a little history lesson first," I suggested.

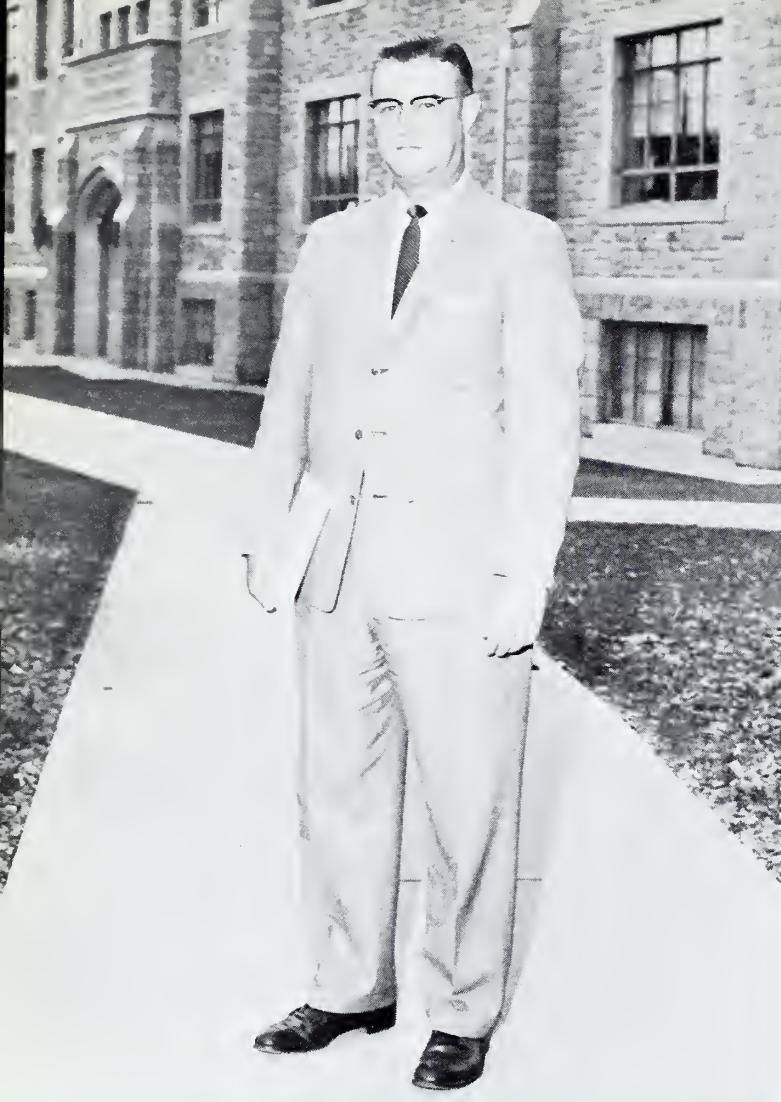
"All right." He settled back, gathering his thoughts.

"The founding," he explained, "of the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind came about through a simple need. Jonathan Ralstin Kennedy was responsible for its beginning. He was a former steward at the Kansas School for the Deaf in Olathe and had moved to Colorado. In his family were three deaf children. Finding no school here for the deaf, he started a movement which matured in the spring of 1874. The Colorado Springs Land Company donated 10 acres for the building site. So you see, it started out as a school for the deaf only."

"When did the department for the blind get started?" I asked.

"In 1877. The legislature passed a law admitting the blind, making it 'The Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind.'

"After its humble beginning with seven students, the school has enrolled more than 2,200 students



Roy M. Stelle, superintendent and principal of the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind.

Instructor Paul E. Pearson looks on as Velda Rook, deaf student, applies her brush to one of the figurines molded in the ceramics class for the blind.



Roy M. Stelle, superintendent and principal of the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, received his bachelor's degree at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Ill., and while there, worked at the Illinois School for the Deaf to help pay his expenses. It was during that time that he became interested in the work that has become his lifetime career.

He attended the Clark School for the Deaf at North Hampton, Mass., to train for teaching the deaf, and received his M.S. degree at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Stelle taught in a public school in Green Bay, Wis.; was a teacher at Central New York School for the Deaf in Rome, N. Y.; returned then to the Illinois School for the Deaf as a teacher.

Still seeking more knowledge in teaching the deaf, he attended the only college for the deaf in the world, Gallaudet College in Washington, D. C., where he earned his M.A. degree.

Stelle then went back to Illinois School as supervisory teacher in the primary department.

During World War II he worked in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and spent four years working out of Houston, New Orleans and Pittsburgh.

After the war he returned to the Illinois School for the Deaf and worked as assistant superintendent until the summer of 1948. At that time he transferred to the Texas School for the Deaf. In 1954 the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind became the work and residence of Roy Stelle and his family, consisting of his wife and three boys, ages eight, 11 and 14.

through the years. From the 10 acres donated by the Colorado Land Company, the school now covers 24 acres practically in the heart of Colorado Springs. There are 10 buildings making up the classrooms and dormitories. The remaining space is utilized in playgrounds and an athletic field."

"Can any student, deaf or blind," I inquired, "get into the school?"

"The school accepts children between the ages of five and a half and 18 whose hearing or vision is impaired to the degree that they cannot progress in the public school systems," the superintendent stated.

"Children who have additional handicaps, such as being crippled, must be considered on an individual basis. We have a staff psychiatrist who is consulted on the borderline cases," he said.

"Does the school assume full responsibility for the entire school year?"

"Parents are responsible for providing an incidental and emergency expense fund (usually \$15) for the

year, a weekly allowance, transportation to and from school, clothing and such medical and dental care as cannot be provided through the school health program.

"Otherwise, the school becomes as much of a home for the children as possible during the term."

"For example, on an ordinary school day, the first bell rings at 6:15 A.M. and the students have 15 minutes to rub the sleep from their eyes or catch another five winks. A piping hot breakfast is served them at 7:15 and they have until 8:12 to get to their first classes."

"After school, supper is served at 6 P.M.; a quiet hour is scheduled between seven and eight (when students enjoy television or activities of their choice). They retire at 9 P.M."

"Ready for a 'Cook's' tour?" Mr. Stelle asked, leading the way.

We went first to the deaf boys' dormitory, where each room held three beds in a row . . . each neatly made, covered with a bright-colored spread. All the pupils were in classes and the dormitory was quiet.

Mrs. Martha Schif, housemother to that particular group of boys, heard us meandering about and came out to greet us.

She talked about "her" boys with pride. Her living quarters were just down the hall—the place where the boys like to spend their evenings, looking at TV and tumbling about the carpeted floor as they might do at home.

The lavatory was tiled and shiny. Red, green, blue and yellow tooth brushes were peeking from the marked glasses. (Marked with their names.)

"Do you have any trouble with homesickness?" I asked Mrs. Schif.

"Very seldom," she assured me. "Of course, it is a little strange for the children at first, leaving their homes. Especially, the deaf children, because they have the communication problem the blind ones do not have to contend with."

"But before long," she reflected, "they find they are among others like themselves and fall into the groove probably happier than they had been before."

The misgivings I had felt concerning the morale of the pupils of the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, being away from home and with such handicaps, were being swiftly dissolved by just listening to the soft-spoken housemother.

The infirmary caught my eye because of its modern design and colorful and decorative front. A 17-foot mural of Italian glass tile and hammered bronze covered the front within the reach of the smallest child. Designed and sculptured by Edgar Britton of Colorado Springs, the raised bronze-work included images of animals, birds and fish with a descriptive notation in Braille.

The mosaic panel was designed with two things in mind: the fact that the deaf child is particularly sensi-



For the first time, Bonnie Kilthou (with the aid of earphones) gets the idea of the sound of the cowbell and displays her delight to her teacher, Mrs. Evelyn Anderson.

tive to color and the fact that the blind child is particularly sensitive to texture.

Inside, the usual hospital antiseptic odors hit my nostrils, but a bright, clean cheerful unlike-a-hospital-look hit my eye.

A little boy (the infirmary's one patient for the day) was literally climbing the pink headboard of his bed. I could not help but watch the restless gyrations of the boy, not sick enough to be content with the attentions of those administering to him—but inflicted with a rash which kept him from his classes at school.

"There is no in-between for the students," Mr. Stelle explained. "Since it is the only time our housemothers get a rest, either the child is well enough to attend school or must be admitted to the infirmary."

I learned that four nurses rotate on duty in the small hospital. A city physician is on call at all times; an ear, nose and throat doctor is available as well as an oculist.

Sixteen beds lined the newly painted walls of the rooms—either two or four beds to a room. Latest hospital equipment was on hand for any type of emergency.

"It's wonderful having this glassed-in nurses' station," the pleasant-voiced lady in white told me. "Now we can watch all the doors of the rooms and when the little ones come into the waiting room, the glassed box keeps little hands away from pill-boxes, etc. The blind ones especially want to touch things. It was a real hazard until now."

I could see what she meant.

* * * * *

Mrs. Evelyn Anderson bent over the small round table where four six-year-olds diligently worked creating multi-colored subjects in crayon. These were four beginning deaf children, two boys and twin girls.



Their eyes in their fingertips, the reading class enjoys the story in their Braille readers with their teacher, Miss Bambina Marcantonio. Miss Marc (as she is called by her pupils) is a graduate of the blind department of the school.

A little freckled face was upturned toward Mr. Stelle. A tug at the man's sleeve caused us both to look at the little figure whose sole means of communication were the light in his eyes and exaggerated gestures. That light was responsible for the compassion I suddenly felt for this little one.

The boy was pointing to the blackboard stick figure which the teacher had drawn to represent him. That's me, his motions indicated as he nodded his head and patted his chest.

These were the first stages of training for the deaf children. It was necessary to use pictures in order that the child who had never heard words might be able to associate the two.

Teaching the deaf child is a long, slow process of patience, understanding and hard work. Where the hearing child starts the wheels of education rolling with a vocabulary of approximately 2000 words, the deaf child starts to school with maybe two words in his vocabulary.

"But it is such rewarding work," Mrs. Anderson told me. She picked up two drawings which the identical twin girls had fashioned.

"This is most interesting, I think," she said. "I asked them each to draw likenesses of themselves. This is the result."

It was startling. One twin drew a stick-figure, long and thin; the other imagined herself as a big pumpkin-like figure, mostly head and smiling.

Within the soundless worlds these kids lived in, they thought, saw and dreamed just as any hearing child would do. I suddenly felt like an outsider . . . looking in through a glass partition . . . quarantined from them in my own world of sound.

In one corner of the room, small-sized earphones

lay on the small-sized table. Mrs. Anderson played a children's record and let me try on the earphones.

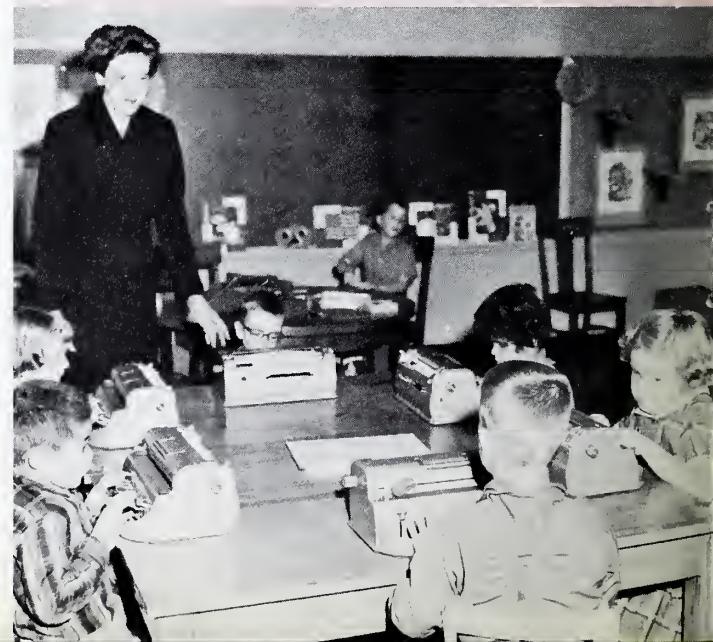
The sound was greatly amplified even when the control was turned to the lowest volume and my hasty impulse was to snatch them from my sensitive eardrums.

"Of course, not all children have enough hearing to get the sound at all," she explained. "But it is a thrill to realize they are hearing."

Even though doctors' reports show that there is very little, or no degree, of hearing, the child has been tested with an audiometer which produces only a tone. Music is something for them to hear specifically.

We walked through the dining hall, the kitchen, the bakery.

The first steps at learning Braille is illustrated here in the beginning blind class with their Braille writers under the supervision of Miss Forest Creighton.





Older deaf students learn about the other side of the world from their instructor, Floyd S. Rogers.

The large dining room was set for the noon meal. Approximately 200 places rimmed the tables neatly and precisely. There was no question as to where the kitchen was. Tiny hungerpangs were beginning to gnaw at me, it being near lunch-time, and the delicious odor that filtered through the doorway indicated the right way to go.

The cook, who was deaf, was stirring the bubbling goodness in a kingsized pan—just out of the oven. What looked to be giant pressure cookers stood with lids upraised like great open mouths waiting to be fed. These were for soups, my guide told me.

A steamtable full of other tempting viands waited for the stroke of twelve, when there would be hurried scooping into the pans to proportion the contents to

Space travel, rocket ships and satellites are part of the science studies enjoyed in W. H. Fulker's class for the blind.



the hungry youngsters.

The bakery was a maze of whiteness. Mr. Fred Gustafson, in charge, stood with his back to us taking large sheets of cookies from the rotating racks of a huge oven. Though he was deaf and talked to Mr. Steele in sign language, it was not hard for me to get a clear picture of the pride and enthusiasm that was being rolled into the pastries at this remarkable school.

Thirty-five pie shells were lined on the pantry shelves. Many loaves of freshly baked bread were uncovered for us to see. Mr. Gustafson pointed to the recipes that were "set out" for the day.

Two deaf trainees were squeezing lemons to add to the filling for the 35 pie crusts. The odor of the freshly baked bread together with the tangy lemon juice made my mouth fairly water. Perhaps my appreciation showed, for suddenly before me was a tray of cookies. I accepted one gratefully, and as I suspected, they were delicious.

"Baking is a trade many of our deaf students take up," Mr. Steele explained. "Another is printing. We'll go to the printshop now."

* * * * *

A copy of "The Colorado Index" lay on one of the tables—a four-page paper published on slick paper.

"It's printed right here, as is everything else," said Mr. Steele. "This paper, a monthly, is one of the many undertakings in the print shop."

"Do the students submit materials?" I asked.

"Yes, we try to encourage initiative along those lines . . . it is a good outlet for any journalistic talent."

That was only a beginning. Other publications created by the ink and skill of the department were:

Directory and Calender of Activities, listing a complete roster of the faculty and a schedule of school



Many painstaking hours are spent by the blind students to learn the art of chair caning. Harvey Fisher is shown lacing the straw-like fibers on the practice chair.

activities throughout the year; an information booklet to advise parents of clothing the children will need, and provide other informative material; the Columbine, a graduation issue of the Colorado Index, reviewing the year's happenings; as well as many other books and papers to fulfill the print-needs of the school.

The printshop instructor was Thomas Fishler, a graduate of the school. Though he was proficient in operating the school's linotype, Mr. Fishler was attending a class in Denver to learn still more progressive methods in the printing field.

"Printing," Mr. Stelle concluded, "gives the deaf student a vocation that can bring him higher-than-average pay in the working world."

* * * * *

"Hello, Mr. Stelle."

Three boys in the room, three hello's.

Though blind, they knew the superintendent's voice as he walked in. They turned as they spoke, but their hands worked deftly on the jobs they were doing.

One boy was practicing the art of caning a chair (one of the few ways the pupils can earn money for their work from the public, thereby developing a feeling of self-sufficiency).

A rubber mat (made from old tires) was the project the second boy worked on with nimble fingers,

lacing the long black strips. The third boy was standing in front of a work-table of unfinished ceramic figures.

"Because this particular work requires precise timing," instructor Don Harris explained, "Tony here has learned to count out the minutes and does a fine job on these figurines."

From there we went to the woodworking room where W. F. Fulker was watching the deaf boys in their work with power saws, making lamps, tables, chests and other finely-finished articles.

"Other vocational subjects," Mr. Stelle said, "are arts and crafts classes for the deaf; piano tuning, a phase of the music department for the blind; practical training on the school's switchboard for the blind; shoe-repairing for the deaf, and typing for both departments."

I learned that extracurricular activity for both deaf and blind students is emphasized, to give the student a well-rounded program during his school years. Most students are members of the Boy and Girl Scouts, and just as the hearing and seeing Scouters enjoy the meetings and club activities, so do the deaf and blind.

There are physical education classes for both the deaf and blind students, from beginners to near-graduates. The program takes in gymnastics, swimming and such side-activities that go with contests such as cheerleading, student managership of sports and playing in the band. No child is ever left out. Some type of activity is always provided to suit the capabilities of the student.

* * * * *

"Hi, Vicki," Mr. Stelle said.

A smile crossed the lips of the pretty little blind girl as she came toward us. She reached for the hand that went to the voice speaking to her.

"Mr. Stelle," she laughed — as if the identification were just a game and it pleased her to make a good guess.

She headed on down the hall, then it happened. The thing that I had wondered about — how the young ones managed to navigate without guides.

The "bump" was audible several yards away. Being

Fred Gustafson, center, explains to deaf trainees, Ruben Atencio and Bill Clifton, how the freshly baked bread should be handled. Gustafson is a graduate of the deaf department of the school.



about the same height, the two little heads had come together without warning. One might think that a good hair pulling brawl would ensue. Instead:

"Excuse me!" both girls merely rubbed the redding splotches appearing on their foreheads and went their ways.

Along with learning to read and write, the little ones were being trained to accept the results of their handicaps in a courteous manner.

We passed a door.

"Those small typewriters you see there in that room are Perkins Braille writers. That's the beginning class for the blind," Mr. Stelle said.

Miss Forest Creighton met us at the door and spent a good many minutes explaining the method of teaching in her class. Using toy cupcake pans (six-cup) and small rubber balls, the first fundamentals of Braille are explained to the pupils. They seemed amazingly clear. The letters are made up by the respective cups occupied by the balls. The same idea was carried out with the Braille writers on a minute scale. The upside-down perforations could be read by feeling their position within the "section of six" with sensitive fingertips.

Numbers, on the other hand, were Braille bars, the bars being placed at certain angles to designate which number. For practice purposes, some of the children were moving large bars in a specially-made board, learning the different positions and the numbers the position represented.

Left and right. Something that the sighted child learns from looking at comics, for the blind child, must be emphasized and practiced constantly. Small Braille pegs made of plastic are furnished, as well as a board resembling the pegboard, to enable the blind child to begin his spelling, just as the ABC blocks are used by the sighted child.

I picked up one of the tiny pegs and ran a fingertip across the surface as I imagined a blind person would do. All I could say was that it was something rough. My fingertips were devoid of sensitivity; I was a seeing person.

A vocation chosen by many deaf students, the printshop is under the tutelage of Thomas Fishler, a one-time student of the deaf department. He is shown here explaining a printing operation to a student, Joe Chitolo.



Rare beauty and feeling is accomplished in the music department for the blind. Instructor Allen E. Uhles accompanies the orchestra in a practice session before an appearance at one of the numerous programs the class puts on each year for organizations and clubs in Colorado Springs.

Then I was introduced to an amazing teacher. Miss Bambina Marcantonio, once a student in the blind department of the school, was now teaching little ones to adapt themselves to the sightless world as she had done. The school employed one other blind instructor, Abraham Weiner.

I felt right at home in Miss Bertha McCain's class of deaf students. "Welcome" radiated from her as well as her class. She emphasized how important it was to them to have others interested in their progress. At the moment, a boy was completing a sentence on the blackboard.

It was explained to me that deaf students learn words, but that their handicap keeps them from always knowing which word falls where in a sentence. Miss McCain had found the "breaking-up" system of "what," "who," "where," etc., across the blackboard helped them learn the correct order of a sentence.

A hand waved in the air. Who was the woman visiting them? Their interest pleased me, and Miss McCain wrote my name on the board explaining why I was visiting their class. I waved goodbye to them a little later and we continued our tour.

We walked up the steps of the modern new building. An organ played quietly. It was in this building that I was introduced to Charles E. Kaufman, head

instructor for the blind. Mr. James R. Kirkley was head teacher of the deaf department.

In this building we visited many rooms where geography, spelling, typing, in fact, just about any subject taught in conventional schools was included in the curriculum for the deaf and blind.

Only the systems for teaching were different. For instance, the solar system was illustrated to a blind class by means of foil balls on wire stretched across the room. There was the sun — a large cylinder of yellow cardboard.

I remembered how I learned about the solar system. These blind students possibly came away from class understanding and thinking a great deal more about the vast heavens than I had done.

An unsteady blast from a coronet caused Mr. Stelle to lead the way down the corridor toward the music room. Allen Uhles was giving a blind boy a lesson. The teaching of musical instruments is another wonderful service the school undertakes to give the blind a source of entertainment, or even occupation.

We walked toward the practice rooms. A rather difficult number was being practiced in one of the rooms on a piano. Looking in, we saw a blind high-school boy practicing. His hands would travel across the music and then, as though his fingers could remember, he played the notes his fingers had read.

"Music for the blind is really a matter of memory," Mr. Stelle explained.

On down, we peeked in through another door where Mrs. Ida Hutchison, a music instructor, sat, not at a piano, but at a Braille writer.

"She is transposing music to Braille," he explained.

While Mrs. Hutchison was telling me how the notes must be written in Braille as well as each instruction for "rests," etc., Mrs. Ronald Gardner bubbled into the room with excitement and enthusiasm written all over her. She was the supervisory teacher in the music department and was delighted about the Christmas programs the children were rehearsing.

How, I wondered, could blind children help but want to be a part of the vitality that radiated from every facet of the music department?

"Well, I guess that about covers it," Mr. Stelle said as we walked toward the administration building once more, "unless you think of something else."

My feet told me there was nothing else.

The green paper Christmas trees scotch-taped to the windows in the various rooms made me reflect that soon the school would be emptied like Santa's bag and the students would return to their homes and families for the holidays.

Braille writers would be silent, practice rooms quiet, and a stillness would echo through Jones, Brown, Ritter, Palmer and West halls.

Tears would soon be streaming from sightless eyes at the immeasurable beauty in the music of Christmas, and heartbeats would quicken in the ears of the deaf at the sight of the Christmas colors.

The Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind would close its doors, its students — the deaf and the blind — would leave, taking with them, in their hearts, the age-old, incomparable spirit of the Christmas Season.



Recess time at the Colorado School for the deaf and blind resembles recess time at any other Colorado Springs school — the merry-go-round doesn't stop until the bell rings for classes to resume.

Being sick isn't half so bad when you've got a nice nurse. Little Loretto Di Paola opens her mouth willingly for nurse Ethel Carrick when it's temperature-taking time.







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